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AUTHOR White, Shirley A.
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ABSTRACT

An analysis of secretarial employment advertisements in major metropolitan newspapers across the United States was made in order to determine required job skills. The study was designed to provide information regarding the modification of the secretarial training curriculum in order to reflect the current trends and developments in the business world. With the increased use of dictating/transcribing equipment and the advent of word processing, secretarial students trained in these areas, as well as in manual shorthand, typing, verbal and written communications skills, human relations skills, effective telephone procedures, and organizational skills will be in demand in the business world. The findings of this study suggest that business educators should do the following to prepare secretarial students realistically for the changing office environment: (1) provide training in writing skills and proofreading; (2) provide training in verbal communications and human relations skills; (3) provide training in organizational ability and self-starter skills; (4) provide training in effective telephone techniques; (5) provide at least one course designed for dictation/transcription machine and word-processing equipment; (6) provide typing courses with emphasis upon attaining an accurate speed of 50 words per minute or better; and (7) provide optional programs with and without the study of shorthand. (Author/KC)

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An Analysis of Secretarial Employment Ads with Implications for Curricular Modification

DR. SHIRLEY A. WHITE
Louisiana State University

Dr. Shirley A. White
Department of Business Communications and Office Systems
College of Business Administration
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70893-6320

Purpose

With the advent of word processing, computerization, changing office structure, and the resulting effects, some of the standards of performance and the needs for secretarial employment that have been identified in the past may not be applicable to the future needs of the business community. In some instances, technical skills and knowledges may be new ones, required at higher or lower levels, or in some cases may not be required at all.

Should, for example, emphasis on keyboarding skills, machine transcription, basic language arts, and human relations skills be accelerated in light of the emerging office? Should shorthand instruction be de-emphasized? Should new courses be introduced or existing course content be modified or eliminated? This study was designed to aid in answering some of these questions. The data gathered could also provide information to business educators and guidance counselors enabling them to guide students more effectively. This guidance could result in students being better equipped with marketable secretarial skills when they seek office employment. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze secretarial employment ads found in major metropolitan newspapers across the United States in order to determine the required job skills.

Procedures

The method of inquiry used in this study was an analysis of the secretarial employment ads found in major metropolitan newspapers across the United States. The cities were selected according to (1) primary business centers, primary classification; and (2) the top 20 cities by population. These cities included

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Baton Rouge, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. Baton Rouge did not meet the criteria for selection; however, it was used because it is the city in which the researcher resides.

According to the Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide (1979), each of these cities is an independent center of large-scale financial and wholesaling activity, as well as a very large retailing center. Firms with nationwide distribution are almost certain to have important branches or outlets in all of these cities.

The Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide (1979) also stated that each city in the primary classification has at least $200 million annual sales of shopping goods in its metropolitan area and has daily newspapers whose total circulation is over 400,000.

The major newspapers reviewed were the ones with the largest circulation in each of the designated cities as indicated in the Newspaper Directory (1979). These papers included:

Baton Rouge Sunday Advocate
Boston Sunday Globe
Chicago Tribune
Dallas Times Herald
Houston Chronicle
Los Angeles Times
New Orleans, The Times-Picayune
Philadelphia Inquirer
San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle
The Cleveland Plain Dealer
The Detroit News
The New York Times
The Washington Post

The secretarial ads in the Sunday edition of each of the newspapers, with the exception of The New York Times which has a special secretarial section on Wednesday of each week, were reviewed twice a month over a four-month period--November 1980 thru February 1981. The secretarial ads analyzed in this study

were selected from the newspaper editions that offered the largest number of ads during the review period.

All ads labeled administrative assistant/administrative secretary, executive secretary, legal secretary, medical secretary, or with the name "secretary" were analyzed. The required job skills enumerated in this study included the ones mentioned in a minimum of approximately one fourth of the secretarial ads regardless of level of position, experience, or educational requirements.

The "shorthand skills not required" data were compiled from secretarial ads that indicated "No Shorthand Necessary" and from other ads where shorthand was not specified. This information was included in the study because with the increased use of dictation/transcription equipment and the advent of word processing, the need for shorthand-trained secretaries by businesses is a controversy which has curriculum implications for business educators.

A problem encountered in collecting the data was that in many ads specific shorthand and typing requirements were not indicated. The ads simply stated "good shorthand and typing skills required" or "excellent secretarial skills required." However, since the majority of ads listed specific skills requirements, the shorthand and typing analyses included:

Shorthand Requirements

under 80 wpm
80 - 90 wpm
91 - 100 wpm
over 100 wpm

Typing Requirements

under 50 wpm
50 - 60 wpm
61 - 70 wpm
over 70 wpm

A breakdown by city of the 1,656 secretarial ads according to specific skills required is included in the Appendix.

Major Findings

The findings of this study included:

1. A total of 1,656 secretarial ads were analyzed. The required job skills indicated in a minimum of approximately one fourth of the ads included:

a. Written/Verbal Communications Skills
b. Organizational Skills/Self-Starter
c. Human Relations Skills
d. Excellent Telephone Techniques
e. Dictation/Transcription Equipment Skills
f. Word Processing Skills
g. Typing Skills
h. Shorthand Skills
i. Shorthand Skills Not Required

2. Approximately one fourth (345 or 21.0 percent) of the 1,656 secretarial ads indicated "written/verbal communications skills" as a job requirement. This finding supports the various literature studies which indicated that written/verbal communications skills are becoming more important in the office of the 80s.

3. Five hundred sixty-nine (or 34.0 percent) of the 1,656 ads specified "organizational skills/self-starter" as a job requirement. These two skills have been and will continue to be essential for the successful secretary.

4. More than one fourth (431 or 26.0 percent) of the ads asked for secretaries with expert human relations abilities.

5. Of the 1,656 secretarial ads, 445 (or 27.0 percent) specified "excellent telephone techniques" as a required job skill.

6. Approximately one fourth (389 or 23.0 percent) of the ads indicated "dictation/transcription equipment skills" as a job requirement. Thirty-nine (or 53.0 percent) of the ads in the Chicago paper specified this skill as a job

requisite. Many studies have pointed out that the utilization of dictation/transcription machines is gaining momentum, especially with the installation of word-processing centers.

7. Only 256 (or 15.0 percent) of the ads designated "word processing skills" as a job requirement. However, as more companies begin actively utilizing word processing systems, the need for secretaries qualified in this area should increase. The largest portion (74 or 30.0 percent) of ads requesting "word processing skills" as a job requirement was found in the Washington, D.C. paper.

8. Six hundred twenty-six (or 38.0 percent) of the secretarial ads indicated a typing requirement of "50-60 wpm." Three hundred fifty-eight (or 22.0 percent) of the ads specified "61-70 wpm" as a typing requirement. The requirements of "50-70 wpm" constituted a total of 984 (or 60.0 percent) of the 1,656 ads analyzed.

9. Four hundred eighty (or 54.0 percent) of the 888 secretarial ads indicating shorthand as a job requirement specified "80-90 wpm" as an essential job skill. Ninety-one (or 10.0 percent) of these ads identified "91-100 wpm" as a shorthand skill requirement. The requirements of "80-100 wpm" constituted a total of 602 (or 64.0 percent) of the 888 ads indicating shorthand as a necessary job skill. Only twenty-six (or 3.0 percent) of these ads identified required shorthand skills "over 100 wpm." Approximately one third of the secretarial ads in Houston specified shorthand skill requirements of "under 80 wpm."

10. Of the 1,656 secretarial ads, 768 (or 46.0 percent) indicated "shorthand skills not required."

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn and have implications for curriculum planning in high schools, colleges, and universities.

1. Secretarial students who are trained in the writing skills needed to compose correspondence and reports and in verbal communications skills will be sought after by employers in the business world.

2. Secretarial students who possess good organizational abilities and are self-starters will be in demand in the business offices of today.

3. As more offices become automated, additional emphasis will be placed on relating harmoniously to co-workers, management, and clients. Therefore, secretarial students will need to be well trained in the area of human relations.

4. Secretarial students well trained in effective telephone procedures will possess a job skill required by more than one fourth of the positions found in the employment ads reviewed.

5. Secretarial students who are trained in the use of dictation/transcription equipment and word-processing equipment are becoming needed increasingly in the automated offices of today.

6. Secretarial students who attain typewriting speeds in the speed range of 50 to 70 wpm could qualify, in general, for positions in the majority of businesses in the employment ads analyzed.

7. Secretarial students who attain shorthand speeds in the speed range of 80 to 100 wpm could qualify, in general, for positions in the majority of businesses requiring shorthand in the secretarial ads reviewed in this study.

8. Secretarial students skilled in both manual shorthand and dictation/transcription equipment will have an advantage over the secretarial student who is skilled in only one of these areas.

9. Secretarial applicants could adequately fulfill the requirements of approximately one half of the secretarial positions found in the employment ads reviewed in this study without using manual shorthand.

Implications for Business Educators

To foster improvements in education, curriculum evaluation is a necessary and continuous process. In order for students to be prepared for the changing office environment, the secretarial-training program must remain up to date and reflect the current trends and developments in the business world. Therefore, business educators may need to introduce new courses and existing course content may need to be modified or eliminated.

The findings of this study suggest that business educators should do the following to prepare secretarial students realistically for the changing office environment:

1. Provide training in the writing skills needed to compose and transcribe business correspondence and reports. In this training, the importance of proofreading should be stressed.

2. Provide training in the verbal communications and human relations skills needed by workers in the office in order to interact harmoniously to co-workers, management, and clients/customers.

3. Provide training that will stress the importance of organizational ability and self-starter skills.

4. Provide training in effective telephone techniques. A secretary who does not practice good telephone procedures can lose a company thousands of dollars in business.

5. Provide at least one course designed for dictation/transcription machine and word-processing concepts and equipment training.

6. Provide typewriting timed-copy training with emphasis placed upon attaining an accurate speed of 50 wpm or better.

7. Within colleges and universities, provide optional programs with and without the study of shorthand. The programs that require the study of shorthand should provide training with emphasis placed on attaining mailable copy within the speed range of 80 to 100 wpm.

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APPENDIX

A Breakdown by City of 1,656 Secretarial Ads According to Specific Skills Required

	Baton Rouge		Boston		Chicago		Cleveland		Dallas		Detroit		Houston		Los Angeles		New Orleans		New York		Philadelphia		San Francisco		Washington DC		Totals	%
Total Secretarial Ads Reviewed Per City	56		134		73		28		78		23		319		225		140		183		83		59		256		1,656	100.0
Skills Required	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-Cent	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-cent	No.	Per-cent
Written/Verbal Communications Skills	0	0.0	47	35.0	27	36.0	13	46.0	8	10.0	8	34.0	114	36.0	54	24.0	43	31.0	6	4.0	28	34.0	26	44.0	71	28.0	345	21.0
Organizational Skills/ Self-Starter	14	25.0	55	41.0	31	42.0	11	39.0	29	37.0	16	70.0	99	31.0	65	29.0	45	32.0	32	17.0	38	46.0	20	34.0	100	39.0	569	34.0
Human Relations Skills	12	21.0	43	32.0	22	30.0	11	39.0	22	28.0	6	23.0	80	25.0	60	27.0	49	35.0	15	8.0	22	27.0	23	39.0	66	26.0	431	26.0
Excellent Telephone Techniques	10	17.0	19	14.0	19	26.0	9	32.0	26	33.0	7	30.0	92	29.0	72	32.0	31	22.0	28	15.0	30	37.0	12	20.0	90	35.0	445	27.0
Dictation/Transcription Equipment Skills	5	8.0	27	20.0	39	53.0	9	32.0	28	36.0	5	22.0	74	23.0	45	20.0	24	17.0	38	21.0	18	22.0	18	31.0	59	23.0	389	23.0
Word-Processing Skills	9	16.0	20	14.0	4	5.0	6	21.0	22	28.0	5	22.0	52	16.0	16	7.0	11	8.0	6	4.0	10	12.0	8	14.0	76	30.0	256	15.0
Typing Requirements[a]																												
under 50 wpm	0	0.0	4	3.0	5	7.0	1	4.0	12	15.0	2	9.0	9	3.0	5	2.0	4	3.0	1	.5	2	2.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	45	3.0
50 - 60 wpm	21	38.0	36	34.0	25	34.0	8	29.0	28	36.0	9	39.0	101	32.0	128	57.0	52	37.0	73	40.0	35	43.0	26	44.0	74	30.0	626	38.0
61 - 70 wpm	11	20.0	35	26.0	23	32.0	6	21.0	23	29.0	3	13.0	68	21.0	36	16.0	41	29.0	36	20.0	14	17.0	11	19.0	51	20.0	358	22.0
over 70 wpm	0	0.0	14	10.0	8	11.0	2	7.0	10	13.0	2	9.0	47	15.0	25	11.0	0	0.0	14	8.0	9	11.0	6	10.0	42	16.0	179	10.8
Total Secretarial Ads Indicating Shorthand as a Job Requirement	27		72		36		15		38		11		155		129		75		105		43		33		149		888	100.0
Shorthand Requirements[b]																												
under 80 wpm	5	19.0	0	0.0	7	19.0	0	0.0	8	21.0	0	0.0	48	31.0	9	7.0	18	24.0	14	13.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	13	9.0	122	14.0
80 - 90 wpm	11	41.0	47	65.0	18	50.0	9	60.0	21	55.0	6	56.0	101	65.0	67	52.0	31	41.0	73	70.0	19	44.0	13	39.0	64	43.0	480	54.0
91 - 100 wpm	0	0.0	11	15.0	4	11.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	18.0	0	0.0	31	24.0	8	11.0	0	0.0	8	19.0	6	18.0	21	14.0	91	10.0
over 100 wpm	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	6.0	0	0.0	4	11.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	18.0	14	9.0	26	3.0
Shorthand Skills Not Required	29	51.0	62	46.0	37	50.0	13	46.0	40	51.0	12	52.0	164	51.0	96	43.0	65	46	78	48.0	39	48.0	26	44.0	107	42.0	768	46.0

Note: All percentages rounded off.

a/b: Percentages appear distorted because of the number of ads which did not indicate specific requirements.